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THE FALLEN HEROES OF FAITH – LESSON 8

PAUL

Nero's persecution of A.d. 67 targeted both Jews and Christians who were converted Jews. The two most prominent proponents of the Christian faith were the apostles Peter and Paul. Peter ruled from Jerusalem where he was captured and killed. Paul was being held in Rome as a prisoner. It is there that he would be beheaded as recorded by Tertullian.

Gregory the Great and a few other writers say that Paul was led three miles outside of Rome and executed on the left bank of the Tiber River. Abdias writes that Nero sent two of his personal esquires, Ferega and Parthemius, to bring back the confirmation of Paul's execution. Abdias continues on to say, that when the two esquires encountered Paul preaching his final sermon, they felt convicted and asked Paul to pray for them that they might believe on Jesus and be converted. Paul told them to be baptized in the river near his sepulcher.

There is a story, or perhaps a legend, also put forth by Pope Gregory the Great whose account was written more than 500 years later. I hold it in some suspicion since the Catholic Church is known for creating traditions that are put forth as truth. He wrote that when Paul's head was severed, it bounced three times (hardly likely) and in the spots where it bounced, three fountains appeared. The site became known as "The Three Fountains" and they built a cathedral there called the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, honoring the Apostle.

We owe most of our doctrinal foundations of Christianity to the teachings of Paul recorded in Acts and in his fourteen epistles (if Hebrews is counted). I know of no New Testament figure that had such fervent zeal for God as Saul who became Paul. He endured much persecution, even accused wrongfully by other prominent Christian teachers. He escaped death many times, and even led people to Jesus upon his execution.

Should we not have such zeal to proclaim the gospel?